



HARFORD COUNTY GOVERNMENT

David R. Craig

Harford County Executive

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State of the County Address

February 5, 2008

President Boniface, members of the County Council, distinguished guests, fellow citizens, it is my honor, privilege and pleasure this evening to present to you the State of the County. I am pleased to report, that the state of our County is strong!

Much has been accomplished during the past year and together, we have worked hard to help make Harford County a better place to live, work and raise a family.

2007 presented many challenges and opportunities for Harford County. This past year also revealed some of the best work of the County Council – working together as a team and with the Administration to tackle a myriad of issues from school construction to open space acquisition, from enhancing public safety to preparing for BRAC to name a few.

Many individuals and groups helped us along the way to be the best we could be. I would be remiss if I did not recognize those leaders who helped government serve our citizens well.

Lorraine Costello, Director of Administration. **Aaron Tomarchio**, Chief of Staff, **Jim Richardson**, Director of the Office of Economic Development. **Rob McCord** our County Attorney, **Nancy Giorno**, Deputy County Attorney, **John Scotten**, Treasurer **Roxanne Lynch**, Director of the Office of Government and Community Relations. **Mary Chance**, Director of the Department of Community Services. **Bob Cooper**, Director of Public Works. **Dick Lynch**, Director of Inspections, Licenses and Permits. **Debbie Henderson**, Director of Procurement. **Scott Gibson**, Director of Human Resources. **Pete Gutwald**, Director of Planning and Zoning. **Joe Pfaff**, Director of Parks and Recreation and **Sean Kingston**, Director of Housing.

Each of these distinguished cabinet members provided leadership to their respective departments of government and together their efforts paved the way for improvements in government.

Additionally, I wish to recognize the efforts of several other critical partners with the Administration. They are **Joe Cassilly**, States Attorney; **Dr. James LaCalle**, President of Harford Community College; **Dr. Jacqueline Haas**, Superintendent of Schools for Harford County; **Audra Caplan**, Director of Harford County Libraries; **Sheriff Jesse Bane**; and **Albert “Cubby” Bair**, President of the Harford County Volunteer Fire and EMS Association.

These individuals and their respective governmental units or organizations, worked closely with the Administration to provide the best service possible for our constituents.

I mentioned earlier that together we have had a very productive and successful year improving the quality of life in Harford County. Here are but a few of the many examples of which we can be proud.

Working together, we have provided tax relief for the citizens of Harford County. I am particularly proud of the fact that we increased the property tax credit for preserved farmland by **43%** with an average savings to a working farm of over **\$1,000** and lowered the property tax cap by **10%**.

Once again, Harford County has received a very favorable Bond rating. We have worked hard to maintain a **Double A+** rating, which indicates strong financial management of our tax dollars and solid fiscal planning for the future.

We also changed the way we do business by expanding “*Open Government*” which allows citizens to view important meetings on-line and the up-grade of the County website to a more user friendly format.

The Department of Community Services and the Office of Drug Control Policy, partnered with the Harford County Sheriff’s Office to host the first ever “Gang Summit” in November. Additionally, the Department negotiated an agreement for the redevelopment of Washington Court, a 28 acre blighted site in Edgewood. A total of **\$58 million** has been invested in the redevelopment of this community.

The Department also provided approximately **\$8.3 million** in local, state and federal funding for a variety of services to include senior services, at-risk youth, drug prevention programs, low income and homeless services, assistance for those with disabilities and transportation to mention a few.

The Office of Economic Development continues to work hard to bring jobs and business opportunities to Harford County.

Although BRAC takes an enormous amount of time and energy, it is not the only priority for the County. Supporting other industries through retention and expansion of programs; the redevelopment of existing commercial corridors as well as the expansion of local agriculture and tourism is also a priority.

We have already begun to see the positive impact of BRAC in our community. The **\$477 million** contract to build the Center of Excellence at APG has been awarded and defense related companies from Ft. Monmouth have already opened offices with advance personnel here in Harford County.

Last fall we participated in the opening of research facilities at Waters Edge in Belcamp to house the MITRE Group – one of our first defense contractors to move to Harford County from New Jersey.

The OED staff continues to provide new and existing businesses with four (4) loan funds designed to encourage investment, business retention and job creation. To date, these funds have supported over **\$35 million** in capital investment and **252** new jobs.

During the past year, we continued our investment in the Rt. 40 corridor. Last year 21 property owners and businesses were certified for more than **\$43 million** in real property improvements and more than **300** new jobs were created.

Another component of the revitalization of the Rt. 40 corridor has been the creation of the Chesapeake Science and Technology Corridor and the regional support we have received for this initiative.

During the National Association of Counties Conference last year, we received a NACo award for our efforts with this special economic development undertaking. We were recognized as one of the “**Top Ten**” sustainable communities in the nation!

Another vital component of the Office of Economic Development is tourism and marketing of Harford County.

More than one million people visited Harford County last year, of which nearly three quarters of a million people visited Harford County attractions. Additionally nearly **400,000** people attended events held in the county, among the most prominent the LPGA at Bulle Rock.

Naturally, tourism is good for our economy. Historically visitors to our great county spend over **\$200 million** a year here.

To help support and improve the infrastructure of Harford County, our Department of Public Works continues to provide exemplary service to our citizens.

In 2007 we witnessed the tragic collapse of a bridge in Minnesota. Our DPW personnel have an excellent inspection and improvement program to ensure such a catastrophe does not happen here.

Last year DPW personnel at a cost of more than **\$1.4 million** completed five (5) vital projects. Among those projects were the replacement of the Telegraph Road Bridge over Island Branch; the Jerusalem Road Bridge over the Little Gunpowder Falls and the Neal Road Bridge over Big Branch.

Additionally, during the coming year, approximately eight (8) projects will be undertaken by DPW at a projected cost of nearly **\$9 million**.

Finally, we salute the DPW Highway Maintenance Section for their outstanding efforts to clear roads and help our citizens recover from the devastating effects of the tornado that struck portions of the County last July. Roads were cleared and normal traffic resumed in short order thanks to the efforts of these dedicated men and women.

The Department of Planning and Zoning has worked tirelessly to improve and expand service to our citizens.

The Zoning Code Work Group was initiated in June of 2007 with a charge to review and update the current Zoning Code. The workgroup is on schedule to complete their work and make recommendations to the County Council by May of this year. This has been no easy task and we appreciate the efforts of the entire team of citizens, business leaders and P and Z staff that are actively engaged in this process.

With the support of this Council, legislation was introduced and passed which updated and improved our nationally recognized County Agricultural Land Preservation Program, to change the ranking and pricing structure.

Furthermore, we continued our commitment to land preservation. Last year we preserved 13 farms totaling approximately 1,700 acres. Additionally we settled on over 650 acres in the County Land Preservation Program and additional 200 acres in the Maryland Ag Land Preservation Fund and added 92 acres in the Rural Legacy Program. As you can see, we are well on our way to achieve our land preservation goals.

The GIS Division of P & Z has undertaken the largest, most accurate, comprehensive mapping project in the history of Harford County. New planimetric and topographic mapping – four times more accurate than previous mapping efforts, will be used by County engineers, planners, emergency responders and many others.

This state-of-the-art system is another example of our efforts to improve citizen access to information.

The Department of Inspections, Licenses and Permits also had a productive year in 2007.

The Department worked with the Electrical Board and the Harford County Electrical Contractors Association on the review and revisions to the Electrical Code.

In an effort to reduce criminal activity, DILP received 29 Community Action Requests from the Harford County Sheriff's Office and subsequently worked with other County and State agencies and departments to address these issues.

With regard to inspections, DILP personnel also responded to and abated 84 abandoned, unsafe properties located throughout the County last year. Additionally, inspections of the Upper Chesapeake Hospital addition are now **95%** complete and on schedule.

Finally, DILP anticipates completion of a computerized Town Permit system by the end of the second quarter of 2008. This will help improve efficiency between all three (3) towns and the Building Services Division.

The Housing Agency made an innovative suggestion during the adoption of the budget last year to help first time home buyers. "House Keys for Employees" provides **\$5,000** to assist first time buyers with settlement and closing costs thus achieving the American dream of home ownership.

The Council approved this new line item and now 20 Harford County employees are new home owners.

We are also pleased to report that the Department of Human Resources, made significant progress in several areas.

Harford County is now the regional leader when it comes to employment eligibility verification in the public sector. We are the first public employer in the Baltimore region to participate in the federal government's **E-verify Program**.

As a result of our participation in this program, Harford County is allowed to electronically verify the employment eligibility and Social Security Numbers of newly hired employees. Thus, we are improving the accuracy of wage and tax reporting, protects jobs for authorized American workers and help employers maintain a legal workforce.

Additionally, the Department of Human Resources has worked aggressively to lower administrative costs of doing business. For example, since February of last year, the Department has lowered the costs of employee background checks by nearly **25%**!

Two years ago we adopted the final piece of a market adjustment for teachers. Last year we did the same in public safety. This year we have conducted at your direction, a market study for county employees.

The result of this will be included as part of our FY 09 budget proposal for your consideration. Adoption of the proposal will ensure wage parity for our very dedicated county employees.

Finally, as a result of the State's fiscal dilemma this past year, I initiated a "***Commission on Efficiency and Economy in Government.***" The work of the Commission parallels similar work from a task force established by the former mayor of Indianapolis, Steve Goldsmith, in an effort to improve the efficiency of that municipal government during the late 1990's.

It should be noted that the work of this Commission is unlike any previous efforts by county government to cut costs, trim budgets or make government operate more effectively.

The Commission is comprised of men and women – civic and business leaders from our community – who have volunteered their time and effort to examine Harford County Government closely and make recommendations for the implementation of policy, procedures or actions to help us serve the citizens of Harford County more efficiently and where possible, saving taxpayers money, and allowing us to get more value for our government.

I look forward to their report later this spring.

In adopting the FY 08 budget, the Council approved a **\$2 million** line item to develop a *“Global Plan”* for providing an efficient place in which county government can operate. You recently approved the purchase of the final piece of property which can allow us to move forward with this plan.

At your direction we have examined alternative methods of financing and you will soon be presented legislation to determine whether a “lease for purchase” plan is the best method to accomplish our goal.

We will have a rare and unique opportunity to replace outdated and inefficient infrastructure with modern facilities to house our Sheriff’s Office, the Health Department, court service and general administration.

This plan will ultimately save us **\$40 million** which can then be freed up for schools, senior centers, an Ag service center and other vital needs.

Make no mistake about it, 2007 was also a banner year for our school system.

For the first time in the history of Harford County, we committed more than **\$90 million** for Capital Projects. Funding for Capital Projects include a new **Bel Air High School** to replace the current 60 year old facility; a new **Edgewood High School**; new **Deerfield Elementary School**; renovation and modernization of **Joppatowne Elementary School**; the completion of the renovation and modernization of **North Harford High School**; the expansion of **Aberdeen High School** and plans for a new elementary school on Vale Road to relieve overcrowding at nearby elementary schools in the Bel Air attendance area.

In August of last year we opened our first new comprehensive secondary school in 27 years. **Patterson Mill Middle High School** is the model in how we will prepare the students of today to be the leaders of tomorrow.

If we religiously adhere to our plan of seven schools by 2011 we will virtually end the use of portable classrooms at the secondary level and reduce by over half those at the elementary level.

You also charged us to look at alternative ways to finance this Capital Plan. Working together and in close contact with our State delegation we have drafted legislation which will add “Special Infrastructure Districts” to the method of paying for schools, libraries, roads and other infrastructure, thus keeping that burden off the backs of current residents and tax payers.

I appreciate the support of the County Council in funding these projects. We have a quality school system, but unfortunately, our schools are in need of renovation or replacement at costs never before seen in this county.

Thank you for past and continued support of these and other capital improvements.

This past year also was a year of celebration and a time to honor and pay tribute to Harford Community College in recognition of their 50 years of service as an institution of higher education.

Harford Community College continues to have the second lowest tuition in the State, making it one of the most viable and affordable higher education opportunities in Maryland. Plans for the development of the west campus including a cooperative agreement with Towson University will keep HCC at the forefront in higher education.

We salute Dr. LaCalle and the Board of Trustees, past and present, for their leadership and vision in guiding HCC to the excellent college it has become. Our best wishes are extended to the faculty and staff of HCC that they may continue to excel as leaders in education for not only Harford County, but the State of Maryland.

During the development of the FY 08 budget in the spring of last year, Sheriff L. Jesse Bane, the Deputies and Corrections Unions and I agreed to an unprecedented pay package for law enforcement personnel. You, the County Council, supported that agreement. The result has been a proud first for the Harford County Sheriff's Office. For the first time in recent memory we have no vacancies in patrol, investigations or corrections. Most of these vacancies have been filled by lateral transfers of highly qualified officers. This has allowed us the ability to get more officers on the street protecting the safety and security of the people of Harford County.

Yes, we have achieved much during the past year, but I believe the best lies ahead for Harford County.

The inscription on the Great Seal of Harford County reads, “*At the risqué of our lives and fortunes*”. I believe that statement is as relevant today as it was in the late 1700’s when the county was formed. In order to make progress we must take risks – but these risks must be planned and measured.

My administration has established what I believe are six (6) essential goals which will be the basis of what we do during the next several years. Each of these goals or initiatives in some way will touch the lives of all who work, live or come to Harford County to relax and recreate.

Commencing immediately, the Craig Administration will endeavor to act in a responsible way to meet each of the following initiatives:

1) **Public Safety** – “Ensuring a Safe Harford” – We will work to ensure Harford County’s public safety providers have the necessary tools and training to meet the County’s growing demand for emergency services in the 21st century.

With this in mind, law enforcement and the community must work diligently and cooperatively to reduce crime, the proliferation of gang membership and illegal drug activities in our neighborhoods.

Foremost among them is Edgewood. We must stop the violence, the bloodshed, the killing of our citizens, particularly our youth, in our streets and neighborhoods. For if we fail in Edgewood, all of Harford fails. We are all part of the same greater community – Harford County.

It is unfortunate that a small number of despicable criminals are ruining the lives of law abiding citizens in Edgewood and other areas in our county.

Let me make this perfectly clear, criminals are not welcome in Harford County and we will not stop, we will not be deterred and we will not fail in our efforts to rid the county of this cancer.

2) **Education** – “Preparing Now, Building for the Future” – We will work to make long term investments in education by ensuring that children have a safe and stimulating environment in which to learn and to encourage and promote the availability of academic and technical programs that prepare all students to compete in the global marketplace.

Harford County is blessed to have one of the finest public school systems in the State. We have excellent teachers, dedicated support staff and are actively in the process of revitalizing and improving the bricks and mortar of the facilities in which we provide quality instruction.

Together, and with the support and assistance of our business and community partners, we must continue to strive for accountability, excellence and quality performance from our school system.

3) **Efficiency in Government** – “Governing Smarter” – We will identify and develop best practices to maximize limited resources and improve the delivery of services to citizens, businesses and governmental agencies.

Simply stated, we must find ways to do a better job of providing government services, while at the same time reducing cost. This **IS** the primary task of the *“Commission on Efficiency and Economy in Government”*.

Additionally, I have tasked Lorraine Costello; Director of Administration to adopt performance measures and establish performance based budgeting.

The Administration is also in the process of conducting a thorough review of all Harford County Government regulations and policies. Where necessary and appropriate, we are updating and revising these regulations.

4) **Economic Opportunity** – “Growing & Sustaining Harford’s Prosperity” – We will seek ways to foster an environment within government that encourages financial opportunity and supports private sector ventures that diversify Harford’s economic base in new and existing businesses.

It was once said that *“the business of America is business”*. There is much truth to that statement – especially for state, county and local government. We must do all we can to support the business community which is the economic engine that drives society.

With regard to support economic development in Harford County, we must work together to help improve the basic infrastructure of the county. This includes water and sewer, roads, and solid waste management. Failure to make critical improvements to these vital components of our infrastructure would not be in the best interest of the county.

5) **Environmental Stewardship** – “Protecting our Environment” – We will work to protect and preserve the County’s environment through efficient use and reuse of its resources.

Harford County is one of the true “Crown Jewels” of Maryland. We have beautiful open spaces and waterways. However, each of us, working with and in support of government, must take a more active role in protecting and preserving our land for the generations to come. Our natural resources are precious and must not be wasted.

6) **Quality of Living** – “Safeguarding What is Important to Harford County Citizens” – Together we will work to cultivate life enhancing amenities and necessary infrastructure that enriches the lives of Harford County citizens and neighborhoods through sound planning, practices, investments in parkland and recreation and promotion of community spirit and cultural arts.

Working to meet this goal, Harford County Government must focus on managing growth, and guide the continued creation of safe, adequate, and diverse housing stock that ensures equal opportunity and the availability of decent and affordable accommodations.

These are the goals, which I have established for my administration. In the next few months, we will gather together key partners with Harford County Government, our superintendent of schools, the president of HCC, the Sheriff, the State’s Attorney and others to develop a specific course of action to help achieve these goals.

The time of each entity of County government working in silos – each to their own, not as a team must come to an end. Working together, we can and will accomplish more.

If we are to succeed in all that needs to be done, we must have local answers and local solutions for local problems. If we expect to succeed we must look to ourselves – not Annapolis and not Washington – to educate our children, start our businesses, keep our communities safe, preserve our land and improve our daily lives.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower once said ***“Our real problem is not our strength today; it is the vital necessity of action today to assure our strength tomorrow.”***

During World War I the Prime Minister of Britain once said, ***“Don’t be afraid to take a big step. You can’t cross a chasm in two small steps.”***

President Boniface, and members of the Harford County Council, I look forward to working with you in the coming year and beyond as together we ***“Preserve Harford’s past; and promote Harford’s future,”*** governing smarter, safer and stronger.

May God continue to bless our nation, state and this great county we call home.

Thank you.

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